

ANDROID™ NETRUNNER™ THE CARD GAME

THE DEVIL AND THE DRAGON

Atop the rippling crystal of Lake Victoria sits the skeleton of a second beanstalk. Trade and tourism thrive within the fertile crescent as the Sub-Saharan League, a unity of nations in the midst of an economic and cultural renaissance, works tirelessly to construct the new link between the world of dirt and the limitless expanse. Though determination and focus breed peace within the region, those on the edge wish to disrupt the architecture for personal profit and political vendetta.

THE BANKS OF KAGRA

Fact. The well-dressed person becomes invisible in most “respectable” places.

Fact. I am always well dressed. Even my nightwear is chic—you just never know when you might need to be well dressed. Be prepared, as the Boy Scouts used to say.

Fact. I am no Boy Scout.

But I am prepared. Very prepared.

I am sitting in the queue at Kagra Central Bank—to see how long I can sit, how much I can learn. I am relatively young, bearded, somewhat timid looking, and I wear a crisp linen suit of local Ugandan geometric design that is better than any disguise.

I am anyone and everyone.

The ticket number beeped to my PAD was forty-three, but I let people shuffle past me and I miss my turn as I browse my PAD, as if an earnest student in study. I have human geography on my notes, in case the cameras get suspicious and zoom in on me: *The impact of the proposed space elevator on the movement of persons within the region and associated social-economic vectors.*

Clever stuff, but just smoke and mirrors.

Although we do all know Kampala is gonna be BoomTown Central.

And where the money goes, I follow.

My glasses miss nothing, recording the come and go of security bioroids with chained cases of money I can smell. My dorky-looking, thick, black frames and lenses are customized, top-of-the-range AlgoRithm Riders, bought off the black market. They hunt down the numbers around me, the regularities in proceedings, the flashes of account statements, all the while processing, crunching, and cracking the codes that whisper in the Net here.

The gold suitcases I watch the most. They flash explosive warnings to any unauthorized fingers, DNA coded. I’m young, but old fashioned. Sure, creds are good—cash is even better, seeing as you can both touch and smell it, crumpling it underneath your nose. Nothing beats the heavy heft of a gold bar in the hand, though.



People keep talking to me; I’m your regular homeboy.

“Watcha studying? Good, nothing beats a proper education, son.” *How about free money, old man?*

“What you think about SSO not getting the elevator contract?” Shrug. *Don’t give a shit who gets it, long as I find my way to the financing source.*

“Go study in a library, boy!” *I got your numbers. Enjoy waking to an empty bank account, fogey-face.* I sneer at his back.

Finally, I stand and stretch to welcome the cascade of data flashing across my Riders and into my PAD: access codes pieced together for the elevators across the way, heading down into vaults full of Soufrikan gold.

Fact. Stage 1 complete. Time to move, before any alerts get tripped.

“It’s me next,” I say to the woman hobbling ahead of me. She turns, and I see she is stooped and on a cane that senses the space and compensates for her poor balance and posture.

Her face is lined with age and fringed with grey locs that cascade over her shoulder and down her back. She’s dressed formal and smart, her coat decorated with faded barbets and kingfishers, threadbare from overwear. This is probably her one outfit suitable for a bank such as this. Her worldly goods are seemingly all in a tattered straw bag over her shoulder.

“I’m sorry, sonny, but it is *my* number that’s been called.”

I smile. She reminds me of Grannie Chinelo—gone some years past, poor but proud and feisty until the end. “Never apologize for who you are,” grannie had often told me, “and be kind when you can.”

I swore on her grave I would rise above her poverty and become the richest man in Africa. *Sorry, Granny, but I’ve had to be mean. Many times.*

"I was lost in my studies," I explain. "I've missed my turn, so I should be next."

The woman lifts her silver cane—she is more stable on her feet than I'd thought. "Education is good, young man. Keep studying." She shakes her cane to drum home the words, the bag on her shoulder drooping.

"Sixty-eight!" the booth golem shouts again.

I have spotted something. "You go, bibi." I bow with respect.

She smiles. "The young are still good." She swivels and strides off to the teller.

Me, I "drop" my pen onto her vacated chair and swiftly bend to pick it up, alongside the leather purse that has fallen from her bag. I flash a glance inside. Bits of paper and a—a gold coin. An old Krugerrand...

Nothing beats the blink of gold—and Krugerrands are antique dynamite, too. One mil on the Shadow Net—maybe two?

I whistle and leave the queue, heading slowly and nonchalantly toward the exit. The doors spin into the bright Kampalan sunshine outside.

Fact. Success, both planned with elevator codes, and serendipitous, with an effing Krugerrand. A good day indeed.

A wailing stops me by the door.

The old woman is staggering in despair, having rifled through her bag and thrown all the contents onto the floor—a pile of clothes, fruit, nuts, bangles, and creams no doubt made to try and paste her craggy face together. *That Krugerrand is her all?*

Go, you've got what you want. Go. It pays to stay mean.

A crowd is gathering around her, including a few security golems.

Fact; leave, all else is foolish risk.

The small crowd parts. The old woman stands proudly without her cane, but her bird coat is spotted with tears.

My grannie cried, too, when they told her she had three months to live. Poor or not, she had always given me so much. She had not been ready to die.

And I was not ready to leave.

I shade my Rider lenses and walk across to the small group, waving a purse.

"Look what I've just found," I say.

Fact. In *very* rare moments, seems I can be kind, too.

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